

Title: Becket Keys Free School

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Impact Assessment – Section 9 Academies Act Duty

1. Section 9 of the Academies Act places a duty upon the Secretary of State to take into account what the impact of establishing the new school is likely to be on maintained schools, Academies and institutions within the further education sector in the area in which the school is situated.

Background

2. Becket Keys Free School will be a Church of England Secondary school in Brentwood, Essex. At capacity the school will accommodate 1,050 pupils from Year 7 to 13. It will open in September 2012 with 150 Year 7 pupils.

3. The proposal was submitted by a group that brings together two local Church of England primary school head teachers, the diocese of Chelmsford and the Russell Education Trust, an approved Academy sponsor. The proposers showed that there is strong parental demand for a Church of England secondary school that adds to diversity and range of choices in the Brentwood area. The school will provide a traditional academic curriculum and a distinctive Church of England ethos.

4. The proposers preferred site for the School is the site of the closing Sawyers Hall College. This is situated in the centre of Brentwood and has since been made available to the Trust by Essex County Council. The school has offered provisional places and has currently received positive responses from 141 pupils. This equates to the school having filled 94% of the 150 available places. The remaining places are being offered on a first come first served basis and the school will be establishing a waiting list if they become oversubscribed.

Admissions

5. Becket Keys Free School's admissions policy is compliant with the Admissions Code. If the school is over-subscribed, priority (after first accepting children with statements of SEN on which Becket Keys is named) will be given in the following order:

- a) Children who are looked after
- b) Children for whom special medical or social circumstances require them to be admitted to Becket Keys
- c) Children with a sibling on the roll of the school
- d) After applying the above criteria, up to 50% of the places will be offered to applicants who meet the 'faith criterion'; this criterion will be based on regular church attendance.
- e) After applying the above criteria, the remaining places will be allocated to any applicants, with distance determining who gains a place is more applications than places are received.

Characteristics of the catchment area

6. The school does not have a self-defined catchment area. Instead, for the purposes of this analysis, we have created a proxy catchment area based on the distance travelled by a significant majority (80%) of secondary pupils in Essex. We have therefore included all schools in a 4 mile radius of the Free School.

7. In the Brentwood district where the Free School will be located, the secondary school population is projected to decline by 4.3% over the next five years. Likewise, all districts in Essex are projected to see a decline in the secondary population except for Uttlesford and Epping Forest, which are projected to see an increase of 3.3% and 2.1% respectively. As a result, it is unlikely that any potential negative impact on local secondary schools will be mitigated by growing demand for secondary school places in Brentwood and its neighbouring areas. All of Essex districts currently have surplus capacity, with the surplus of secondary places in Brentwood in 2010/11 running at 13.3%.

Summary of likely impact

8. Becket Keys received initial applications from 176 prospective pupils for its first Year 7 intake. The vast majority of these (160) live in Brentwood. The 16 that live outside of Brentwood are as follows:

Epping Forest	3
Chelmsford	1
Basildon	3
London Borough of Havering	5
London Borough of Redbridge	1
Suffolk	1
Currently living abroad	2

9. This breakdown suggests that the impact of Becket Keys will be most significant on those schools closest to the proposed site of the Free School whose pupils live in Brentwood.

10. Given the expected fall in the secondary population in Brentwood over the next five years, it is likely that the new Free School will create some surplus places, at least in the short-term. However, this will be partially offset by the closure of Sawyers Hall College, which currently occupies the proposed site for the Free School. This school has been earmarked for closure since 2010 and will close when the remaining 505 pupils leave at the end of the current academic year. At capacity, Sawyers Hall accommodated 1,400 pupils.

11. We also expect Becket Keys to attract some pupils who in the past might have taken up places outside of the maintained system. Or who would have taken up places at one of Essex's highly selective grammar schools.

12. Of the five schools closest to the Free School, we expect the Free School to have a high impact on one of those schools, a moderate impact on two of those schools and a minimal impact on the remaining two. We do not expect the opening of the Free School to affect the long term financial viability of any of these schools.

Impact on other Schools

13. Below is a discussion of the likely impact of the proposed Free School on the schools flagged as being at risk of losing pupils, as well as those which are performing poorly and operating with significant surplus capacity. Of the five secondary schools and Academies that fall within a four mile radius of Becket Keys, it is our view that the opening of the Free School will have a high impact on one Academy, a medium impact on two schools and a minimal impact on two schools.

14. A map showing the location of the Free School in relation to surrounding schools is attached at Annex A.

Table 1. Maintained secondary schools within a 4-mile radius of the site of Becket Keys Free School

School Name	Impact	Distance	Capacity	Surplus %	Ofsted Rating
Brentwood County High School	High	0.83	1405	<1%	Satisfactory
Shenfield High School	Moderate	1.47	1510	0%	Satisfactory
Drapers' Academy	Moderate	2.91	1100	55%	Not available
St Martin's School Brentwood	Low	1.90	1722	0%	Good
Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School	Low	0.66	1047	6%	Good

Brentwood County High School

Impact: High

15. Brentwood County High School is a Foundation School situated 0.83 miles south of the proposed Free School site. The school has capacity for 1,405 pupils (around 243 pupils per year group). It had a very small number of surplus places, less than 1% of total capacity in 2010/11 and the school was oversubscribed for entry in 2011/12 with 722 applicants for 243 places.

16. The school was rated as satisfactory by Ofsted in its last inspection in 2011. The school has Key Stage 4 attainment just above the national average – 61% of pupils achieved 5+ A*-C grades including English and maths GCSE in 2010/11 compared with 58% nationally.

17. The schools close proximity to Becket Keys does increase the likelihood of it losing potential pupils to the new school. Although its Key Stage 4 performance is slightly above the national average, this is an affluent area where parent expectations are likely to be higher. In addition, the most recent Ofsted report will have been a disappointment. The School was again graded as 'satisfactory' with only 'satisfactory' prospects for improvement. This highlights a lack of progress in the school since the previous inspection report in 2009 also judged the school as 'satisfactory'.

18. Officials also understand that Brentwood County High has submitted a request to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator to reduce its current Published Admission Number (PAN) from 243 to 185. The reasons for this request are cited as falling secondary school pupil numbers in the area and the impact of the new Free School.

19. Taking all of these factors together we believe that it is very likely Brentwood County High will lose a number of pupils to the new Free School. Although it was oversubscribed for entry in 2011/2012, the combined impact of declining pupil numbers, the school's current performance and the impact of the new Free School will have a high impact on the school. However, we do expect the school to retain a sufficient number of pupils to remain financially viable and we believe that on balance the potential for the new Free School to drive improvements and the additional choice it provides parents outweighs the negative impact on Brentwood County High.

Shenfield High School

Impact: Moderate

20. Shenfield High School was a Foundation School that converted to Academy status in February 2012. It is situated 1.47 miles North East of the proposed Free School site. The school has capacity for 1,535 pupils (around 248 pupils per year group). It had a very small number of surplus places, less than 1% of total capacity in 2010. The school was significantly oversubscribed for entry 2011/12 with 769 applicants for 248 places. The school was rated as satisfactory by Ofsted in its last inspection in 2009. The school has Key Stage 4 attainment above the national average – 67% of pupils achieved 5+ A*-C grades including English and maths GCSE in 2010/11 compared with 58% nationally.

21. Like Brentwood County High, the school is located close to the proposed site of the Free School. At less than 1.5 miles away it is below the average distance travelled to secondary school in Essex (2.4 miles), so in principle could lose more pupils to the new Free School than schools further away.

22. The most recent Ofsted report in 2009 described the school as satisfactory, with progress by pupils from Year 7 less than that of pupils at similar schools. It also describes the quality of teaching as too often no better than satisfactory. This combined with its capacity for sustained improvement being graded as 'satisfactory', parents may be attracted to an alternative.

23. However, even if it does lose some pupils to the Free School, it was significantly oversubscribed for entry in 2011/2012 so should still be able to fill most, or all, of its places. We therefore do not expect the opening of the Free School to affect the long term financial viability of the school.

Drapers' Academy – Havering

Impact: Moderate

24. Drapers' Academy is a sponsored Academy 2.91 miles west of the proposed Free School site. It is situated in the neighbouring London Borough of Havering and opened in September 2010 having replaced King's Wood School. The school has capacity for 1,100 pupils (around 180 pupils per year group) but had a large surplus of around 55% of total

capacity in 2010/11. The school was undersubscribed for entry in 2011/12 and was only able to fill 86 places, just under half of the 180 places on offer.

25. The school has not yet had a full Ofsted inspection. It has however had a monitoring inspection which reported that it had so far made satisfactory progress to raising standards. The school has Key Stage 4 attainment well below the national average – 35% of pupils achieved 5+ A*-C grades including English and maths GCSE in 2010/11 compared with 58% nationally.

26. The school is located less than three miles from the proposed site which is above the average distance travelled in Essex (2.4 miles) for secondary schools. However despite the school being around half a mile further from the Free School site than the average travelling distance to secondary school in Essex, its GCSE attainment is well below average so parents/pupils may well be attracted to a new alternative.

27. Despite the difficulties that the school has faced over the past few years, it is one that is benefitting from some significant investment from its sponsors, the Drapers' Company and Queen Mary College, University of London. As well as putting in place a new Principal and senior management team, the Academy has attracted new teachers that are starting to improve pupil outcomes. In September 2012 the Academy will move into brand new premises, which will offer pupils new drama and music studios, state of the art science facilities and new fitness and sports facilities.

28. We have concluded that whilst the new Free School might pose some risk to the financial viability of an Academy that is so significantly undersubscribed, that risk is only moderate. This judgement is based on the improvements that the Academy is already demonstrating and the investment in the new building will make it much more attractive to parents and prospective pupils. In addition, the applications to Becket Keys do not demonstrate a significant level of demand outside of Brentwood. Of the 176 applications to date, only 5 have been received from parents living in the London Borough of Havering. This suggests that the level of cross-boundary moves by pupils will continue to be very limited.

St Martin's School – Brentwood

Impact: Minimal

29. St Martin's School is a secondary Academy, situated 1.9 miles from the proposed site of the Free School. It has capacity for 1722 pupils and was significantly oversubscribed for entry in 2011. The school was rated as Good, with outstanding features by Ofsted in its last inspection in 2011. Key Stage 4 attainment in 2010/11 was strong with 76% of pupils achieving 5+ A*-C grades including English and maths at GCSE. This is significantly above the national average of 58%.

30. Given that this school has significantly above average GCSE results and Good Ofsted ratings we would expect the loss of pupils to the new Free School to be limited. Even if they do lose some pupils to the Free School they were significantly oversubscribed for entry in 2011 and we would expect them to still be able to fill most, if not all, of their places.

Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School

Impact: Minimal

31. Brentwood Ursuline is a Roman Catholic School for girls aged 11-18, situated 1 mile south of the proposed Free School site. It has capacity for 1047 pupils and was significantly oversubscribed for entry in September 2011. Key Stage 4 attainment in 2010/11 was strong with 77% of pupils achieving 5+ A*-C grades including English and maths at GCSE. This is significantly above the national average of 58%. The school was rated as Good by Ofsted in its last inspection in 2009.

32. Given that this school has significantly above average GCSE results and Good Ofsted ratings we would expect the loss of pupils to the new Free School to be limited. The faith and gender selection also reduces this likely impact of the loss of pupils. However, even if they do lose some pupils to the Free School they were significantly oversubscribed for entry in 2011 and we would expect them to still be able to fill most, if not all, of their places.

Impact on other Faith Schools

33. Becket Keys will be the only Church of England secondary school in Essex. The closest Church of England faith school is St Edward's Church of England School & Sixth Form College, in Romford. This school is over 9 miles away from the proposed site of the Free School in the London Borough of Havering. Based on the initial applications received by Becket Keys and the low proportion of pupils registering an interest from outside of Brentwood, officials conclude that the impact on other faith schools in other Local Authority areas is likely to be minimal.

Impact on post-16 and FE Provision

34. Of the five secondary schools within a 5 mile radius of the proposed Free School site, four have sixth forms. The four are those schools in Brentwood, with Drapers Academy in the London Borough of Havering being the exception. All of the schools with sixth forms offer places to existing pupils at the school on the basis of them achieving the required number of points from their GCSE exams.

35. There is no evidence to suggest that Year 11 pupils switch schools in Brentwood to access alternative sixth form provision at other schools. Officials therefore judge that the impact of the new Free School provision on surrounding sixth form provision will be proportionate to the impact on those schools as a whole.

36. There are no Further Education or sixth form colleges in Brentwood, although Havering College (6.3 miles away from the proposed site of the Free School) and Havering sixth form college (9.5 miles away) offer an alternative for Brentwood pupils.

37. Havering College is a large college offering an extensive Further and Higher Education programme. In 2011, it accommodated over 3,000 Further Education students and was rated by Ofsted as good in its most recent inspection. Havering sixth form college is also a large college with 2,346 16-18 pupils in 2010. It was also rated by Ofsted as good in its most recent inspection. Given the size of the colleges and the quality of provision being delivered, officials judge the impact of Becket Keys as being minimal.

Local Authority View

38. Essex County Council has been kept fully informed about the proposal to establish the Becket Keys Free School. The Council has been supportive of the Free Schools policy generally and has taken a pragmatic and supportive approach in managing the handover of the proposed site from the Sawyers Hall College to Becket Keys.

39. The Council was asked to provide their views on the Free School proposal and responded to that invitation on 29 March. In their response, the Council again stated their support for the Free Schools policy as a whole and acknowledged the potential for Becket Keys to drive up school performance and offer greater parental choice in the area. However, they did raise some concerns about the impact Becket Keys might have on one or two secondary schools. The particular concern is that in the longer-term pupils will be attracted away from what is perceived to be the weakest and least popular school in the town, leaving that school with surplus places, reduced funding and significant challenges in terms of maintaining and improving performance for pupils at that school.

Consultation and Representations

40. Becket Keys Free School has maintained a high profile in the local media since it was announced that the proposal was progressing to pre-opening stage. Regular stories in the local press and a well organised opposition campaign have generated significant interest in the project and a large volume of correspondence.

41. The Becket Keys Free School Trust has undertaken a statutory consultation on whether the Trust should enter into a Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State. The consultation ran for six weeks and ended on 20 April. The consultation was well publicised, with over 1,100 parents registered on the Trust's database contacted directly, press releases issued, interviews given to local newspapers and radio stations. The consultation was also a major item in the local press for a number of weeks, featuring in a number of lead articles. In addition, the Trust directly sought the views of all secondary schools in the Brentwood area, all primary schools in the Brentwood area, the Diocesan Board, Essex County Council and other adjacent Local Authorities.

42. There were a total of 212 responses to the consultation, of which 89.5% were in favour of signing the Funding Agreement and 10.5% against. The main reasons given in favour of signing the Funding Agreement were: the school's emphasis on high education standards; the strong Christian ethos; the use of an existing school building and facilities; lack of other Church of England secondary schools in the area. The main arguments against signing the FA were: the number of surplus places in the area and the pressure the new school will place on existing school's budgets; did not want a faith school; would prefer a vocational centre in Brentwood; the new school will create traffic chaos on the area.

43. The consultation also sought views on the Becket Keys admission arrangements. There were a number of concerns raised by respondents about the arrangements, including; the arrangements are too complex; the policy should not use feeder schools in allocating the non-faith places (because those feeder schools are predominantly Church of England schools); the arrangements favour children too much on faith grounds. As a result of these consultation responses and advice sought from the Office of the Schools Adjudicator, the Becket Keys Free School Trust submitted revised admission arrangements (those set out at paragraph 5).

44. The Department has received representations opposed to the Free School from Brentwood County High School, in addition to representations from local residents and the British Humanist Association. The objections site the following:

- a) An additional school is not required in Brentwood and would be an inefficient use of resources
- b) Brentwood needs a more vocational educational offer, not another school offering a traditional academic curriculum
- c) St Mary's Church of England School should not have been excluded as a feeder school for Becket Keys

Taking these objections in turn:

- a) Whilst Becket Keys would create some surplus places in Brentwood we do not believe this would be an inefficient use of resources if it were to act as a driver to raise standards. This is an affluent area but one where school performance is only in line with national averages. None of the three schools that are most likely to be impacted by the Free School have an Ofsted rating higher than satisfactory. Becket Keys therefore has the scope to act as a real driver of improvement in the area.
- b) Becket Keys Free School is a good example of creating choice for parents. For their application to be successful, the Becket Keys group had to demonstrate evidence of demand for their proposed school. They clearly showed that a substantial body of parents in the area want a Church of England secondary school with its particular ethos and core academic curriculum.
- c) Becket Keys has applied a clear and transparent principle in selecting which primary schools will be designated feeder schools. That is that the feeder schools will only be those where Becket Keys is the closest secondary school. Whilst the Board of Governors at St Mary's primary school are unhappy that they have not been selected as a feeder (because Shenfield High School remains the closest secondary), Becket Keys are clear that deviating from this principle would open up challenges from other Church of England primary schools across Brentwood. Applying this principle also ensures that pupils from Larchwood primary school, a school serving one of the more deprived parts of Brentwood, are prioritised.

45. Overall, officials believe the nature of the proposed offer reflects the distinctiveness of the proposal compared to existing provision in the area and the desire to reflect the likely intake of the school and the community's aspirations. The strong Church of England ethos is one of its key selling points and distinguishes it from other schools that provide the only other option currently. Parents that do not want this type of education for their children retain the option of sending their children to the other schools in Brentwood.

Conclusion

46. Given the expected fall in the secondary population in Brentwood over the next five years, it is likely that Becket Keys will create some surplus school places. However, this will be partially offset by the closure of the Sawyers Hall College and the displacement of pupils

to other schools in Brentwood. We also expect Becket Keys to attract some pupils who in the past might have taken up places outside of the maintained system or in one of the local grammar schools.

47. The analysis above suggests that the new Free School will have a high impact on one school (Brentwood County High) and a moderate impact on two schools (Shenfield High and Drapers Academy, Havering). Whilst all of these schools are likely to lose pupils to the new Free School, we expect all of them to attract a sufficient number of pupils to remain financially viable. On that basis, officials therefore recommend that the benefits of the new Free School in its potential to drive up standards in the area and in offering additional parental choice, outweigh the negative impacts on the other schools in the area.

Map showing location of Becket Keys and surrounding schools

